

OCTOBER 2019

Women in STEM

DECADAL CHAMPION RESPONSE

Introduction

In the Australian medical research sector, we currently have a disproportionately lower representation of women than men at senior research and decision-making levels. Fully accessing our entire scientific talent pool at all levels makes us more efficient and maximises our chances of making discoveries.

SVI aims to ensure a workplace culture of inclusion and gender equality through the implementation of policies and practices that break down potential barriers and actively foster equal representation and participation at all levels, with a particular emphasis is on women, in recognition of their often-greater carer responsibilities. At SVI, we have taken a number of strategic steps in recent years to foster the careers of women.

Leadership

Women are an integral part of SVI including at governance and senior executive levels.

Leading by example:

- Half of SVI's senior researcher cohort are female, all appointed as Professors. SVI's Associate and Deputy Director are female. Four of the five members of SVI's Executive are women.
- SVI ensures that there is strong female representation on all committees, in particular promotion and recruitment panels and committees that influence policy development, such as the SVI Faculty Executive. Men and women on these committees are assigned responsibilities of equal importance.
- The SVI Institute and Foundation Boards are currently composed of 58% women. The Chair of SVI's Foundation is a woman and the previous Chair of the Board of governance, a female, held the position for 13 years. SVI is part of St Vincent's Health Australia, which is under the care of a remarkable group of women – the Sisters of Charity.

A 4-day Research Leadership Development Program is offered annually. One of these funded positions is dedicated only to SVI women.

The retention of valuable women in the research sector is determined by funding. SVI has provided additional support to several of its researchers while competition for peer-reviewed grant funding is tight. SVI has annually secured dedicated private philanthropic funding in the form of two Fellowships for women who have experienced career disruption.

New strategies to address retention of women in the health and medical research sector will include, but not be limited to, identification of gender-specific training and skills development, e.g. academic promotion information and CV preparation specifically for women; specific mentoring for women with high potential or those at-risk of leaving the sector; and adoption of a flexible approach to dealing with the needs of female staff, ensuring adequate support is provided for female researchers.

Evaluation

Associate Director Professor Helen Thomas leads the Gender Equity and Diversity portfolio at SVI. Part of this role involves regularly reviewing our gender equity strategy and assessing the effectiveness of the initiatives and procedures we have in place. SVI's Gender Equality and Diversity Committee is comprised of active researchers at all career stages, with both male and female representation.

SVI reports to, and is assessed by, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency of the Australian Government.

Workplace culture

Paid parental leave and flexible work practices

SVI offers a combination of paid and unpaid parental leave. SVI recognises that family responsibilities extend beyond any period of parental leave, and workplace flexibility is offered. This includes part-time work, and flexible start and stop times, purchased leave, compressed weeks, and portions of the working week carried out from home.

SVI also strives to ensure family-friendly meeting times, and access to meetings by teleconference or VoIP communication. Scientists have access to a laptop that they can take home for work purposes. While staff are on parental leave, their email accounts are maintained, and invitations are made to events and meetings with optional attendance. SVI has dedicated facilities for nursing mothers.

Dedicated Funding opportunities for female researchers

SVI has specifically sought opportunities for partnerships with philanthropic supporters who have an interest in gender equity. This has resulted in two Fellowships being made available specifically for women.

Since 2013, the annual SVI Women in Research Award has been presented to a female post-doctoral scientist at a Mother's Day celebration to assist in the continuance of her work either while she is absent on maternity leave or on a reduced time fraction due to carer responsibilities.

Workplace culture review

SVI recently undertook a workforce culture survey, including the identification and measurement of any gender specific differences across the workforce. An action plan will emanate from the results of this survey on all key areas, including gender equity initiatives where indicated.

Mentor program

Support from other senior researchers offering knowledge, experience and practical help can help increase women's participation. To assist with this, an internal mentorship/foster program is available for all early and mid-career researchers at SVI. SVI also actively encourages its female researchers to attend externally organized networking events.

Mid-career researchers who decide to move away from "hands on" laboratory work are offered alternative employment within SVI where possible to keep these valuable people in the medical research sector.

Visibility

Three outstanding female senior scientists have been appointed as Associate or Deputy Directors of SVI. Recently SVI successfully applied to have the work of these female scientists recognised by the University of Melbourne through Honorary Professorial appointments. Social events were arranged to celebrate the achievements of these three women and to inspire other female researchers to achieve the same level of success.

The successes of female scientists at SVI is highlighted on social media, the SVI website and in the SVI quarterly newsletter.

Strong female representation is sought on institute-sponsored seminars and meetings. Last year, 47% of the weekly SVI seminars were given by women.

Education

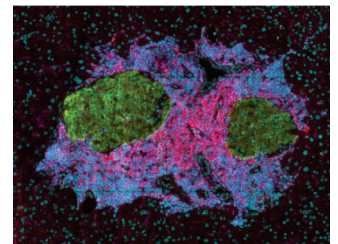
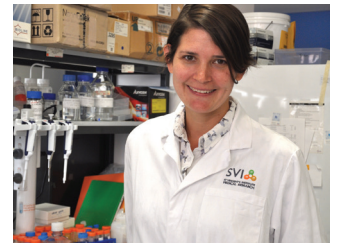
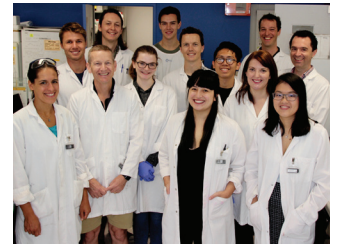
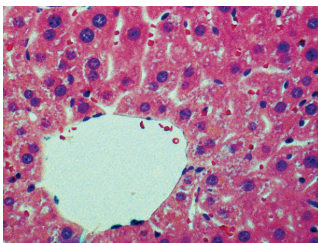
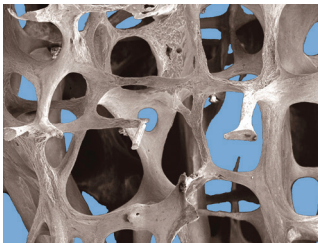
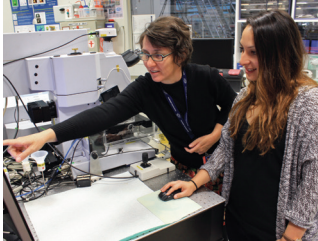
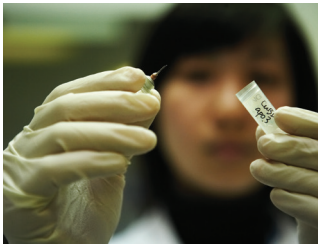
As a member institution of the Mary Aikenhead Ministries, SVI has been encouraged to pursue development of specific educational activities with female high school students to encourage an interest in STEM. This has involved regular annual school tours for students from Siena College, St Columba's College and Genazzano FCJ College. Tours of our laboratories by SVI researchers and inspirational presentations and informal chats with our postgraduate students expose students early to information on the development of a career in science.



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March 2021

Women in STEM

DECADAL PLAN UPDATE

PROJECT: **Women in Stem Decadal Plan 2021 Update**

ORGANISATION: **St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research (SVI)**

AUTHOR: **Professor Helen Thomas, Associate Director, SVI**

Heather Dawson, Head of People and Culture, SVI

Leadership

In 2019 SVI committed to identifying gender-specific training and skills development and to implementing a mentoring program targeting women.

In 2020 SVI ran several management training courses (such as performance management, and holding difficult conversations), female participants in these courses outweighed male participation in each session.

2020 saw SVI launch a new mentoring programme with overwhelming success. We now have 9 female mentors working with early career mentees and a total of 15 female mentees enrolled in the programme to work with more experienced and senior female scientists.

This internal mentorship program will be reviewed this year and improvements made to ensure it remains relevant and beneficial.

Mid-career researchers who decide to move away from hands on laboratory work continue to be offered alternate employment within the institute to keep these valuable people and enable them to lead in other areas.

Evaluation

In November 2020 SVI ran its second staff engagement survey. This time round there were a greater number of questions addressing gender equity in our workplace.

SVI continues to report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency of the Australian Government.

SVI has established a regular communication channel between the Chair of the SVI Foundation (Karen Inge) and the senior management group within the Institute, with the intent of ensuring gender equity maintains its place on the agenda for the Foundation. This has resulted in two fellowships being made specifically available for women.

Workplace culture

SVI continues to work relentlessly on improving workplace culture and has implemented several initiatives to promote equity and diversity including but not limited to

- The launch of a new Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee,
- Revision of our policy on flexible working arrangements as well as the upcoming release of an Online education module regarding working from home, and
- A comprehensive action plan to address issues raised through the 2020 Staff Engagement Survey.

SVI is committed to investing in a HR Information system to facilitate and support improved performance management and development planning processes across the institute.

Visibility

SVI demonstrates an ongoing commitment to increasing the visibility of female researchers both in house and externally. We are striving to achieve equal gender representation within the SVI seminar series. Last year (2020) 40% of the seminars were presented by women and for 2021 we are already at 35% of the seminars being run by female presenters.

Education

As a member institution of the Mary Aikenhead Ministries, SVI is encouraged to pursue development of specific educational activities with female high school students to encourage their interest in STEM. Whilst regular school tours were put on hold in 2020 due to COVID-19, school tours of our laboratories will resume in 2021, facilitated by SVI researchers and post graduate students.

Industry Action

SVI is eager to work closely with others in the MRI community and those beyond. In 2020 SVI actively supported the WisPP (Women in Science in the Parkerville Precinct) application to the Victorian government for funding support towards early/mid-career researchers within the sector.

We continue to work with our colleagues in other research institutes with gender in the forefront of our minds, particularly as plans progress towards the collaborative development of the ACMD(Aikenhead Centre for Medical Discovery).

Covid-19 Response

The changes we saw to our traditional workplaces in 2020 disproportionately impacted female employees. Women bore the brunt of increased childcare responsibilities and the negative impact of the increase in blurred boundaries between work and home.

SVI implemented a variety of measures to mitigate the negative impacts that COVID had on employees. Whilst these measures were applied to all employees it was hoped that the stressors experienced by female employees were alleviated expressly. Some of the measures included:

- Making carers leave available for staff who needed to take time off for home schooling.
- Proactively facilitated working from home arrangements.
- Adapted work patterns and rosters to accommodate those who needed to continue to work on site.
- Redeployed staff to projects where they were required (in some cases COVID related) to avoid staff losses and to enable people to feel like they were contributing to something of benefit to the community overall.
- Paid parking during lock-downs for those who needed to work on-site but were not able or wanting to use public transport.
- The activation of online social events and networking forums – for example for the post-doctoral researchers, students, and individual labs.
- The conversion of our Education seminars to online forums.



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